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AN EARLY CHARACTER SKETCH OF MR. LINCOLN.

BY CHARLES M. THOMPSON.

Characterizations of Mr. Lincoln made by his friends after his election to the presidency in 1860, must necessarily be viewed with caution. The tendency to magnify unconsciously the virtues and vices of an old acquaintance, after he has become great in the eyes of the world, is a human weakness common to all mankind. Our knowledge of the early life of Lincoln is drawn very largely from friendly reminiscences made public after his death; and any information on the subject coming from a total stranger at a time when the future president was comparatively unknown, is of considerable importance, especially when it substantiates what his closest friends have said about him.

The *Alton Telegraph*, in its issue of August 20, 1847, copied from an Eastern newspaper a native Bostonian's account of his travels in Illinois, in which, without mentioning names, he drew character sketches of several of the public men of the State, one of whom was Representative Abraham Lincoln. Fortunately the *Telegraph* named the men characterized in an explanatory paragraph as follows:

"We shall begin our extracts with the following description of two congressmen from Illinois, who accompanied our traveler, in his land journey from Peoria to Springfield. It will be observed that their names are not given—nor is it, indeed, necessary; for anyone in this State will guess at once who they are, just as readily as he can say *Abe Lincoln*, and *Bob Smith*, or any other familiar words. It should perhaps be stated here, that the 'grumbling humor' to which Mr. Buckingham [our traveler from Boston] alludes, was occasioned by a night's voyage on the Illinois river, in a small steamboat, crowded with volunteers and other passengers, and every nook and corner of which was filled with mosquitoes and other insects unknown in Massachusetts, and rendering sleep, to those unaccustomed to this kind of annoyance, absolutely impossible."

Following the above introduction, the *Telegraph* printed an extract in which the traveler from Boston drew a picture of Mr. Lincoln among his own people. “ ‘Our party was again changed. We had two members of Congress from the State of Illinois, one Whig [Lincoln] and one Locofoco [Smith of Madison County] and persons of other professions. Query—Is a member of Congress a professional man or not? We started in a grumbling humor; but our Whig congressman was determined to be good-natured, and to keep all the rest so if he could. He told stories, and badgered his opponent, who, it appeared, was an old personal friend, until we all laughed, in spite of the dismal circumstances in which we were placed.’ ”

At this point in his narrative, the traveler took occasion to comment on the people of Illinois, and the electioneering methods of their politicians. “ ‘The character of the Western people is in every respect different from ours. Our Locofoco friend is a regular canvasser; he says that he has a way in his district of bowing to everybody, of kissing every man’s child, and making love to every man’s wife and daughter. He regretted that he did not ask ‘Long John,’ as everybody calls Mr. Wentworth, how he should behave in Wentworth’s [Chicago] district, because the force of habit is so great with him, he feared he might exceed the bounds of propriety—it may be that the fashion with ‘Long John’ is more abrupt, and in that case he might be going contrary to established usage. For some miles we were in Wentworth’s district, and a tolerably poor district it appeared to be.’ ”

When the Springfield district was reached he saw Mr. Lincoln at his best as a local politician. There the future president displayed the side of this character so well known to his friends and neighbors. “ ‘We were now in the district represented by our Whig congressman; and he knew, or appeared to know, everybody we met, the name of the tenant of every farm-house, and the owner of every plat of ground. Such a shaking of hands—such a how-d’ye-do’s—such a greeting of different kinds as we saw, was never seen before. It seemed as if he knew everything; and he had a kind word, a smile, and a bow, for everybody on the road, even to the horses, and the cattle, and the swine.’ ”

The writer closed his sketch of the two “congressmen” with an observation on what he was pleased to call “Etiquette among Western Congressmen.” The labors of Mr. Lincoln, in speaking to everybody along the way, “ ‘appeared to be so great, that we

recommended to our Locofoco friend to sit on the other side of the coach and assist in the ceremonies; but he thought that that would be an interference with the vested rights of his friend and opponent, and so he declined, although he was evidently much disposed to play the amiable to several rather pretty girls that we fell in with at one of our stopping places. It seems that, as there is honor among thieves, so there is etiquette among Western Congressmen.' "